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Russia announces unilateral ceasefire in Ukraine next week

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared a 72-hr ceasefire from May 8 midnight to May 10 midnight to mark Victory Day. The Kremlin said the truce was on humanitarian grounds. "Russia believes the Ukrainian side should follow this example," the Kremlin said, adding its forces will respond in kind if Ukraine violates the ceasefire. Dismissing Putin's move as 'window dressing', Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said: "If Russia truly wants peace, it must cease fire immediately." | P12

Omar Abdullah says he will not use the Pahalgam brutality to demand statehood

Assault on Kashmiriyat: J&K House resolution

FAYAZ WANI @ Srinagar

A special session of the J&K assembly on Monday passed a unanimous resolution describing the April 22 terror attack on tourists at Pahalgam as a direct assault on Kashmiriyat, the Constitution and the spirit of unity, peace and harmony. As many as 25 tourists and a local resident were slaughtered in the attack. But what caught the eye was a contrite Omar Abdullah admitting he had failed in his capacities as chief minister and tourism minister to protect the lives of tourists.

Participating in the debate, he added that he will not use the Pahalgam incident to demand statehood. "How can I use the Pahalgam incident to demand restoration of statehood from the Centre? I do not believe in cheap politics... Curse on me if I go to the Centre and tell them that 26 people have died and now give me statehood."

J&K MLAs, including CM Omar Abdullah, pay homage to the victims of the Pahalgam attack, in the assembly on Monday | PTI

Omar described the mas- sacre as the beginning of the end of terror in Kashmir and cautioned against taking any step or action that "distances people from us and hurts this spontaneous protest". He was alluding to the recent demolition of houses of terrorists and mass arrests.

"This was not just an attack on people from one state — it was an attack on the very soul of India. The victims hailed from across India, from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat, from Kerala to J&K. The whole country has been affected by this attack," he said.

"I fully know that J&K's security is not the responsibility of the elected government but as CM and tourism minister I had invited them to visit here and as a host it was my responsibility to ensure the safety of tourists, but I failed to do so," Omar said. P9

Rajnath meets Modi; Pakistan says incursion imminent

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

AMID heightened security activity in J&K as India weighs it options following the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack, defence minister Rajnath Singh on Monday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and briefed him on the ongoing operations. The closed-door meeting lasted around 40 minutes.

Earlier in the day, Rajnath was given a detailed briefing by Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi on the ground situation in J&K.

The meeting came on a day when Pakistan's defence minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif told news agency Reuters that a military incursion by India was imminent. "We have reinforced our forces because it is something which is imminent now," he said, adding some strategic decisions have been taken. Asif said Pakistan would only use its arsenal of nuclear weapons if "there is a direct threat to our existence".

Meanwhile, the Line of Control remained active with Pak Army indulging in small arms fire in the Kupwara and Poonch sectors.

Siddu's slap gesture at cop sparks row

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Belagavi

CHIEF Minister Siddaramaiah raised his hand to slap a senior police officer during a Congress rally against the Centre's policies in Belagavi on Monday after a group of women BJP activists stormed the venue and raised slogans against him and his party. This sparked a controversy as several pro-BJP activists and leaders questioned Siddaramaiah's conduct at the public event. They said as CM it was unfair to do so. Some netizens hit out at the CM, condemning his action.

Siddaramaiah lost his cool when the women BJP activists, holding black flags, entered the venue and started sloganeering. Chaos prevailed at the venue and the CM had to stop his speech for a while. Enraged by this, the CM said, "Who is the SP of Belagavi? How can he allow BJP workers to enter the venue of the Congress rally?"

A video grab of CM Siddaramaiah raising his hand at a police officer at a Congress rally in Belagavi on Monday

Siddaramaiah summoned additional Dharwad SP Narayan Baramani to the stage and raised his hand to slap him. Baramani, who was in-charge of security of the stage, was caught off-guard. However, the rally resumed after some time.

Baramani told *TNIE* that he was overseeing security at the stage area when a group in the audience (BJP activists) started raising slogans against the chief minister.

Police detained the protesting activists and took them out of the venue. Tension prevailed outside the venue when Congress workers surrounded the police vehicles carrying the BJP activists.

An argument broke out between them and some police officers. The police resorted to a mild lathicharge to disperse the Congress workers.

Siddaramaiah, minister Laxmi Hebbalkar and other Congress leaders reportedly expressed their displeasure over the security lapse. They criticised the senior police officers deployed for the rally for the security breach.

Work towards a responsible resolution: US

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

THE United States on Monday said it is closely monitoring rising tensions between India and Pakistan in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack and called upon the two neighbours to pursue a "responsible resolution" to the crisis.

"The United States encourages all parties to work together towards a responsible resolution," a State Department spokesperson said.

The spokesperson reiterated that that Washington "stands with India and strongly condemns the terrorist attack in Pahalgam", echoing recent remarks by President Donald Trump and Vice President J D Vance. Both leaders had expressed solidarity with New Delhi following the April 22 assault, which left 26 dead, with Trump describing it as a "bad one" and acknowledging the deep-rooted tensions over Kashmir.

"This is an evolving situation and we are monitoring developments closely. We have been in touch with the governments of India and Pakistan at multiple levels," a US State Department spokesperson told Reuters in an emailed statement. The statement said that the US administration is in touch with the governments of India and Pakistan at "multiple levels".

India, France ink ₹63K cr deal for Rafale-M fighters

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

INDIA and France on Monday formally concluded the ₹63,000-crore ($7.4 billion) deal for 26 Rafale-Marine fighter jets, in a move aimed at significantly enhancing the Indian Navy's maritime combat capabilities.

According to the contract, French military aircraft manufacturer Dassault Aviation will deliver 22 single-seater jets and four twin-seater trainers.

"The agreement includes training, simulator, associated equipment, weapons and performance-based logistics. It also includes additional equipment for the existing Rafale fleet of the Indian Air Force," the statement added.

Sources said the delivery of the first Rafale-M aircraft is expected by May 2028 and the 26th by 2030, with the crew undergoing training in France and India. Rafale-M jets will operate from Indian Navy's aircraft carriers INS Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya.

The agreement includes transfer of technology for integration of indigenous weapons in India.

EXPRESS READ

Girinath is UDD ACS, Rao to head BBMP

Bengaluru: The state government on Monday issued an order appointing Tushar Girinath, Chief Commissioner, BBMP, as Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Urban Development Department (UDD) and Home Department. The order also stated that Managing Director of Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Ltd Maheshwar Rao has been appointed Chief Commissioner of BBMP. Rao was BBMP Commissioner for a brief period in 2018. Rao is likely to take charge in a day or two. The order comes in view of UDD Secretary SR Umashankar attaining superannuation on Wednesday.